

## MEETING OF MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, March 25, 2026 at 6 PM

This meeting was held via zoom and recorded:

<https://vimeo.com/982262386>

Finance Committee Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

**Finance Committee members present:** Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp, Chris Menegoni (6:02), Emily Siegenthaler, Josh Bell, Stuart Mieher

**Finance Committee members absent:** Leigh Rae, Francia Wisnewski

**Others present:** Town Accountant Angelica Desroches

The meeting was recorded by MCTV.

### Meeting minutes:

- Mr. Bell moved to approve the minutes of March 4, 11, 18, 2026. Seconded by Ms. Siegenthaler and approved.
  - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Abstain, Siegenthaler – Aye

### Non-Capital article votes

- **GMRSD after-school and instructional materials - \$163,717.50**
  - Mr. Menegoni moved to recommend appropriating \$163,717.50 for Sheffield after-school program and instructional materials in the Turners Falls High School, Great Falls Middle School, Hillcrest, and Sheffield Elementary, with \$12,424 to be raised from the unexpended balance of Article #21E of the May 22, 2021 Annual Town Meeting, \$24,393.50 to be raised from the unexpended balance of Article #9 of the October 16, 2021 Special Town Meeting, \$86,900 to be raised from the unexpended balance of Article #23 of the May 7, 2022 Annual Town Meeting, and \$40,000 to be raised from the unexpended balance of Article #24 of the May 7, 2022 Annual Town Meeting. Seconded by Mr. Bell.
  - Ms. Bell-Upp discussed that the articles being repurposed were originally funded with Cannabis Impact Fee Stabilization money and that it is being repurposed to help the school. Mr. Mieher questioned if the after-school funding is bridge funding until the school finds more sustainable funding sources. Ms. Bell-Upp reported that they have applied for a grant, but they do not know if they get the grant until the summer.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Aye, Siegenthaler – Aye
- **Art and Culture - \$7,500**
  - Removed vote due to Selectboard voting down this article
- **Transfer to Reserves - \$399,489**
  - Mr. Menegoni moved to recommend appropriating \$50,000 to the Franklin County Technical Stabilization, \$100,000 to Town Capital Stabilization, \$89,489 to the GMRSD Stabilization, and \$100,000 to the OPEB Trust Fund, with \$89,489 to be from taxation and \$250,000 to be from Free Cash. Seconded by Ms. Siegenthaler.
  - Ms. Bell-Upp reported that there was some discussion at the Selectboard meeting about how money that is being put into OPEB can't be taken back and concern with putting

more money into OPEB. Ms. Desroches informed the Committee that money can come back from the OPEB trust fund if voted as a funding source for retiree benefits.

- Ms. Desroches had some concern about the level of money left in the FCTS Stabilization. Advised changing the budgeting strategy for FCTS over the summer. The first estimate budget should be based on the student lottery number for Montague with an escalator on the assessment per student. This should allow for the estimate number to come in closer with less need for stabilization.
- Ms. Bell-Upp requested a brief overview of OPEB again for new members. Ms. Desroches explained that it is the estimated liability cost for all retirement health insurance based on all current active and retired employees. There are no current minimum funding amount and no date as to which the liability must be funded by. The current plan is that once the pension liability is fully funded to shift that budget line to funding the OPEB liability.
  - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Aye, Siegenthaler – Aye

### **FY27 Operating Budgets**

- **Town Operating Budget Request - \$13,815,938**

- Ms. Siegenthaler moved to recommend a Town operating budget of \$13,815,938, with \$13,815,938 to be raised from Taxation. Seconded by Mr. Mieher.
- Ms. Bell-Upp read questions on behalf of Ms. Rae. Questioned what is going on with the health insurance. Ms. Desroches explained that the insurance came in at a 12.48% rate increase. There is also plan changes with that increase, so there will be a mitigation cost from the Town to the employees. At this point that mitigation cost is not negotiated, so the budget has remained with the 16% increase. Ms. Rae wanted to know more about how the snow and ice deficits are handled. Ms. Desroches explained that the deficit can be cleared up with end of year transfers or go on next year's tax rate according to state law.
- Mr. Menegoni wanted to know where the police budget ended up. Ms. Desroches explained that following a directive of the last meeting she cut the academy line by \$7,000. Mr. Menegoni wanted to know if this is now in line with other 2% cuts. Discussed that with this budget not being submitted by Chief Haskins and with him only having worked for a few months so far it has been tough to figure out what the 2% cut would mean for his department.
  - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Aye, Siegenthaler – Abstain

- **CWF Operating Budget - \$3,306,973**

- Mr. Menegoni moved to recommend a CWF operating budget of \$3,306,973, with \$268,497 to be raised from Taxation and \$3,038,476 to be raised from Sewer Revenues. Seconded by Ms. Siegenthaler.
- Mr. Mieher asked for clarification about how the taxation portion was calculated. He was informed of the Inflow and Infiltration formula that the Town and Sewer department created many years ago and still use to this day.
  - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Aye, Siegenthaler – Aye

- **Airport Operating Budget - \$452,272**

- Mr. Menegoni moved to recommend an Airport operating budget of \$452,272, with \$18,805 to be raised from Town Sale of Real Estate, \$103,167 to be raised from Taxation, and \$330,300 to be raised from Airport Revenues. Seconded by Mr. Bell.
- Ms. Bell-Upp reiterated her concern that the budget might not be enough.
  - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Aye, Siegenthaler – Aye

- **Colle Operating Budget - \$52,250**
  - Mr. Menegoni moved to recommend a Colle operating budget of \$52,250, said sum to be raised from Colle Receipts Reserved for Appropriation. Seconded by Mr. Bell.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Aye, Siegenthaler – Aye
- **GMRSD Assessment - \$13,120,375**
  - Mr. Menegoni moved to recommend a GMRSD assessment of \$13,120,375, said sum to be raised from Taxation. Seconded by Mr. Mieher.
  - Mr. Menegoni questioned how far this budget is from providing level services to the school. Ms. Bell-Upp stated that currently they are looking to cut 5 staff but that it is not set in stone and there are still budget revenue numbers that have not come in yet. Discussed the overall concern with how schools are funded through state aid. Questioned if the affordable assessment is allowing the GMRSD to keep up with other schools who are not bound to an affordable assessment.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Aye, Siegenthaler – Abstain
- **FCTS Assessment - \$1,131,215**
  - Mr. Menegoni moved to recommend a FCTS assessment of \$1,131,215, with \$231,907 to be raised from the Franklin County Technical School Stabilization and \$899,308 to be raised from Taxation. Seconded by Mr. Bell.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Mieher – Aye, Siegenthaler – Aye

**Finance Committee Report**

- The Committee came up with ideas for things they wanted to include in the report:
  - Level Service Minus 2% budget
  - Police Budget
  - Overall impact on the taxpayer
  - Health insurance increase
  - Changing grant environment
  - A points of concern section

**Topics not anticipated in 48 hours**

- Ms. Bell-Upp gave a quick overview of how Town Meeting works and what the Finance Committee role is at the meeting for the new members.

**Next Meeting dates/topics:**

- April 1 – Review backgrounds and begin FC report
- April 8 – FC report finalized
- April 29 – FC Annual Town Meeting prep
- May 2 – Annual Town Meeting

**Adjournment**

Mr. Bell makes the motion to adjourn at 7:06 PM. Seconded by Mr. Menegoni and approved. Bell-Upp – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Bell – Aye, Siegenthaler – Aye, Mieher – Aye

Respectfully submitted,  
 Angelica Desroches

**Documents and exhibits:**